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Broken Vow.

By JANE LUDLUM LEE Copyright, 1907, by C. H. Sateffels.

"Shall I put this gray dress in the trunk, Alice, or do you think it will be too thin?"

This remark was addressed to a disconsolate looking girl who sat huddled up in a big armchair at the window day dreaming. Her dark, red brown hair had not been combed, and her dress consisted of a pink silk wrapper carelessly tied around the waist. No answer was forthcoming to the question.

"Alice, do you hear me?" "Yes—that is, no, auntie—that is, I don't care. I don't want any clothes."

"But, my child, you can't go to a hotel without clothes. Come, you must help me with the packing. I'll attend to the body of the trunk, and you pack the tray."

Alice moved leisurely from her corner and languidly threw some trifles into the trunk.

"This is not my trunk at all!"

In the trunk. She went over to her desk and scratched off a hasty note while her aunt finished her part of the packing. Finally the task was finished, and Alice offered to lock the trunk. This she did, putting the key in her purse.

"Thank you, auntie. I'll be ready promptly at 2, and ask Mary to mail this letter, please."

At about the same hour Willard Kean was walking the floor of his handsome bachelor apartment in a fashionable district of the city.

"I'll be darned if it was my fault, and I'll be darned if I apologize. She can just sulk it out, and I'll leave town where I'll not be tempted. Perry, Perry!" he called, and a little Japanese servant appeared.

"Throw a few of my duds into a trunk, will you? I'm off for a few days at Hot Springs. You know what I'll need—dress suit, dinner coat and a few togs for loading on the piazza. And, Perry, be quick about it, for I'm going on the first train out."

Perry began his task, bobbing in and out of the room, his arms laden with linen, fancy vests, suits, etc. When the packing was finished he asked for the key.

"I'll lock it," replied his master. "You call a cab. That train leaves about 2 o'clock, and if I miss it there will be just one less Jap in this town tomorrow."

Kean walked to the mantelpiece, picked up something, threw it in the trunk and locked the latter. He caught the 2 o'clock train and settled himself in his section.

Alice and her aunt made the same train and were soon comfortably fixed in the stateroom of the adjoining car. Orders were given that meals should be served to them there, while Kean ate in the regular diner.

After a half hour of absolute silence auntie opened the conversation.

"Alice, dear, you must pull yourself together. Willard Kean is not the only man in the world. We really cannot afford this trip, and you must try to get some benefit from it. Hot Springs is full of young people, and I simply cannot have you going about with that long face."

"I didn't want to take the trip. I don't want anything except to be let alone. I don't want to get any benefit, and I simply will not try to be pleasant to anybody, so there now."

Auntie dropped the conversation for a time more propitious. The next day brought them to Hot Springs, where they got off and drove to the hotel. The clerk assigned them to a room, and they asked that their trunks be sent up at once. Two trunks were soon delivered, and Alice stopped to unlock hers. The key went in rather hard, it turned harder, but finally it gave to the strength of her hand. She opened the lid, and her own photograph stared her in the face.

"Auntie, did you put that picture in here?"

"Certainly not, my dear. Why should I? Besides, I have none like that."

"Auntie, this is most peculiar. This is not my trunk at all! Why, see, it is full of men's shirts, vests, ties, etc. It's all a mistake except the picture."

There's no mistake about that. It's mine, all right enough. But what is it doing in a strange man's trunk?"

"Maybe the photographer sold it to him."

"Maybe he did, auntie, but look on the back: 'To the dearest sweetheart in the world—Alice.' That picture I gave to Jack just after we were engaged. The owner of this trunk is a common thief, and I'll report him to the hotel management. Help me fix my hair, auntie. I am going right to the office and have this matter adjusted at once."

Kean dropped off the car at Hot Springs, sauntered up to the hotel and went to his room, where he lit his pipe and began walking the floor. A knock at the door interrupted his thoughts, and he opened it to let in the men with his trunk.

"That's not my trunk, you mutton-head! Get out of here with it!"

"Marked with your name, sir, on the tag. Just try your key and see if you are sure it's wrong."

Kean took out his key ring, all the while talking as he fitted the key in the lock.

"Sure it's wrong! Why, you thick headed chump, don't a man know his own baggage? What is this—a hotel or a batty house? Holy Moses!" he exclaimed as the key fitted and the trunk opened upon a large photograph of himself in a leather frame.

"All right, boys, my mistake," he added as he handed each man a dollar bill.

Left alone, he picked up the photograph and walked with it to the window, plucked himself to see if he was a' then laughed, then swore. Examining the trunk, he realized it was not his, as he had no use for silk petticoats and lingerie dresses.

"I'll keep this photo, all right, all right, but the lady can have her trunk," he mused as he made his way to the office. The clerk smiled as he made the complaint.

"Come right with me, will you, Mr. Kean? A lady just came down from room 411 who, I think, can explain this mistake and give you your rightful belongings."

"All I want is my trunk. I'm not anxious to see the lady."

"But I'd rather you came along to make it easier for me," and Kean followed in silence.

The clerk's knock at the door of 411 was answered by "Come in," and they entered.

"Here is the gentleman whose trunk you have and who can return yours, Miss Buckingham, and"—

"Billy!" "Alice!" "Mr. Kean!" "Miss Buckingham!"

Auntie seemed to have something private to say to the clerk, for she asked him to step into the hall for a moment with her, thus leaving the two culprits alone.

Alice looked like a wilted flower, and tears came to her eyes. What could a man do, even if it was not his fault, even if he had taken a solemn oath not to apologize? He reached out his arms, and she slipped into their embrace and cried just a few happy tears on a shoulder very dear to her.

"Please don't cry, Alice. Of course I was to blame. It was nasty of me to tease you about that Benton girl; but really, dear, I only did it just to see how much you cared."

"And I cared so much. But, Billy, dear, how can you explain about those trunks? My key opened yours."

"Easy enough, darling. We bought those two trunks on that shopping expedition when auntie chaperoned us to Paris at the Bon Marche, and evidently the locks were the same. We won't have that trouble again, Alice, for the next time we take a trip there will only be one trunk for both of us. Where is your ring, dear—consigned to the secret of the ash barrel?"

"Oh, Billy, you're horrid to find me out! Here it is around my neck. You see, I wrote you saying the engagement was all off, but I kept the ring just for a day or two, you understand, thinking maybe—oh, don't be so upset!"

"Well, I'll forgive you this time, but don't take it off again until the plain gold one goes on under it."

And she promised to do as he said.

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